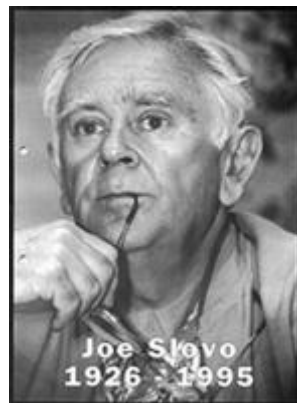


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# South Africa - No Middle Road

1976



## Second Half

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### **3 The Resistance**

Broadly speaking, the struggle against national domination in South Africa can be subdivided into three phases: the wars of resistance; the pre-1960 responses to conquest; and the current phase, in which the armed perspective is once again part of the drive for liberation.

#### **THE WARS OF RESISTANCE**

First contacts between the indigenous people and foreigners were not always hostile. Trade in ivory, cattle and labour in exchange for European commodities took place. The use of land by white farmers, sometimes contractually arranged with the Chiefs in the name of their people, was permitted in the spirit of indigenous custom which excluded Western concepts of individual ownership of property.

But even these relations of commercial intercourse were always one-sided and fragile. The 'new civilization' tolerated the politics of coexistence as long as it made possible unequal exchange, willing surrender by the tribes of the best pasture lands, and supplies of near-slave labour. Punitive military expeditions always hovered in the background as a reserve weapon for the continuation of colonial politics by war. In the century between 1779 and 1879, history tells of ten major wars of indigenous resistance to foreign control. But 'between these bloody armed clashes (and even before the first 'official' war in 1779), settler expansionism into the interior was accompanied by numerous guerrilla skirmishes.

By 1770, the systematic extermination of the San hunter (in so-called 'bushman' country abutting the Cape settlement in the north-east) was already well advanced.

On the Eastern Cape frontier, warfare between settler raiding parties and the Xhosa tribes raged intermittently. The Xhosas, with a more advanced social system based on cattle breeding, and agriculture, and more effective military organization and traditions, made a less easy prey than the San for the marauding settler bands. The *King William's Town Gazette* of 14 August 1856 said of the Xhosas: 'We have observed, in connection with the native character, that lean and starving men are always tractable and civil, but the well-fed and sleek, impudent and easily led to mischief.'<sup>1</sup>

This 'impudence and mischief' put a heavy price on the conquest. The saga of Xhosa resistance over a long period of time was heroic in its proportions. But the ultimate crushing of the resistance was perhaps historically inevitable. Not only did the colonists

possess overwhelming military resources (grapeshot against the spear); but in the age-old tradition of 'divide and rule', they were able to play on tribal divisions.

The Xhosa version of the conflict is not yet fully recorded. However, the Xhosa grasp of the issues involved is impressively described in a British soldier's account of an address by a Xhosa counsellor to the English commander, Colonel Willshire, after the Xhosa defeat in the fifth War of Resistance (1818-19). The counsellor was part of a group which had come to offer itself in exchange for the defeated Xhosa leader, Makana, imprisoned on Robben Island for life.

'The war, British Chiefs, is an unjust one. You are striving to extirpate a people whom you forced to take up arms.' Initial contact between the settlers and Xhosas was friendly and warm until the herds of the Xhosas increased so as to make the hearts of the Boers sore. What those covetous men could not get from our fathers for old buttons, they took by force. Our fathers were men; they loved their cattle, their wives; their wives and children live upon milk; they fought for their property. They began to hate the colonists who coveted their all and aimed at their destruction ... If we had succeeded; our right was good, for you began the war. We failed and you are here.<sup>12</sup>

On this occasion, some 3,000 square miles of Xhosa land and 30,000 head of cattle constituted the cost of the failure. Makana was to drown off Blaauwberg beach in an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the prison island which today, once again, keeps African resistance leaders under lock and key.

In other parts of the sub-continent, the story was the same. North of the Orange River, the independent Griqua states fell to the Boer conquest of the 1860s. Sotho resistance under Moshweshwe I - a general in the Shaka mould and a statesman of great talent - was also fierce. Before his death in 1870 the Basotho had retained a measure of independence under British 'protection' which eventually prevented the incorporation of their remaining lands into the Union of South Africa. The new Boer Republics in the North found the process of subduing the existing African traditional societies costly. The Pedi under Sekhukhune in the East and the Setswana in the West fiercely resisted the land grabbing and labour hunting. And it was not until 1898 that the South African Republic succeeded in defeating the Venda.

The great Zulu kingdom in the end also succumbed to overwhelming force, - but not without a struggle which became legendary. Under Dingiswayo it had begun the welding of the tribal factions into nationhood. This was already well advanced by the mid-nineteenth century.\*

*\*It was undoubtedly accompanied by inter-tribal war and attendant cruelties. Racist historians who attempt to denigrate the process by harping on the atrocities not only exaggerate the element of violence but also, more*

*often than not, conveniently omit comparison with the savage destruction of both life and property- which surrounded nation-building in Europe and elsewhere.*

In Zululand, as in the Eastern Cape, the colonists originally hoped to achieve their territorial ambitions through the lure of trinkets. Simon van der Stel sent a galliot to Port Natal (now Durban) with instructions to purchase 'that bay with some surrounding land from the King and Chief of those parts for some merchandise consisting of copper arm and neck rings and other articles'. Later, when war rather than commerce became the instrument of settler expansionism, the cohesion of the Zulus and their advanced military techniques (pioneered by Shaka) made them a formidable foe.

It was not the so-called 'war-like' Zulu chiefs who chose armed confrontation. The events leading to the tenth war of resistance in 1879 without a doubt demonstrate settler intentions to provoke a conflict in order to destroy the Zulu kingdom, and the army which was its defence. The prize would not only be cattle and land, but the prospect expressed by Governor Shepstone that Zulu warriors would 'be changed to labourers working for wages'.<sup>4</sup> But before the change was enforced, these warriors gave more than a good account of themselves.

At the battle of Isandhlawana in 1879, Europe's foremost army, with modern breech-loading guns, sustained a military defeat at the hands of Zulu soldiers with stabbing spears. Before the battle, when the British intention to destroy Zulu power had become crystal clear to him, Cetshwayo told a messenger who brought an ultimatum from the British: 'Go back and tell the English, that I shall now act on my own account and if they wish me to argue I shall become a wanderer but I shall not go without having acted.'<sup>5</sup>

In the end, having acted, Cetshwayo became a 'wanderer'. After a successful British assault on his stronghold at Ulundi, he was tracked down in the Ngomi forest and banished from his kingdom.

The scene was thus set for the fulfilment of Shepstone's dream. Zululand was split into thirteen parts under separate chiefs salaried by the government. New tax laws were promulgated, designed to force the Zulu warrior to offer himself as a labourer to settler farmers: a device soon to be followed by administrations in other parts, of Southern Africa. This provoked the final episode of old-style resistance when, in 1906 in Natal, Bambata led an unsuccessful armed uprising against these taxes. To destroy the myth of Bambata's invulnerability', his head was cut off by his 'Christian' conquerors and publicly paraded.

The destruction of Bambata and his guerrillas in the Nkandla forest represents a watershed in indigenous resistance to colonial rule. Resistance of that type could no longer be sustained by traditional African tribal societies. The independent tribe with its military organization - the base of the resistance - had been destroyed

throughout the whole of Southern Africa. There had been no concerted African resistance; the enemy had exploited divisions between and within the different tribes, some of whom were temporarily inveigled onto the side of the colonists, only to be destroyed in their turn when they had served their purpose; there had been an absolute disparity in weaponry. Each of these factors played a part in the ultimate defeat.

The period of imperialist primitive accumulation - so familiar in colonies throughout the world - had run its course. The usual progression from trade, through to conquest, followed by economic and political control, was complete.

A new era of political struggle opened. It began uncertainly because the core of former resistance in the countryside had been destroyed, and the new forces were not yet fully developed.

The early stages of both national and working-class struggle bore the marks of this transition. They saw the emergence of nationally orientated organizations amongst the Indian and Coloured peoples, and in 1912 the creation of the African National Congress. With the lessons of the conquest behind it, the African National Congress set itself the task of promoting a national African consciousness and of eliminating the historical hangover of tribalism and regionalism. This was also the time when developing capitalist relations of production stimulated the growth of political and trade union organizations, which began to assert workers' interests in the economic and political spheres.

The history of the early responses of various national groups and class forces to the conquest has been set out in works by Roux (*Time Longer Than Rope*), Lerumo (*Fifty Fighting Years*) and, above all, by H. J. and R. E. Simons in their richly documented *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. It is impossible here to do more than concentrate on a number of important themes which highlight the way in which both national and class forces grappled, sometimes uncertainly, with new tasks posed by changed and continuously changing conditions.

It will be seen that, in the course of time, the attitudes of the main political organizations were radically transformed on a number of fundamental questions.

The African National Congress of today, for example, led by men like Tambo and Mandela, with an unqualified demand for people's power to be achieved by revolutionary force, is a far cry from the African National Congress of the twenties, which was still shy to challenge the roots of white supremacy, and still looked to the imperialists at Whitehall to ameliorate the conditions of Africans.

The Communist Party, too, has come a long way since its formative years and the days of the 1922 general strike. Despite efforts by communists to steer this white miners'

strike away from racialism, the Communist Party nonetheless ranged itself with those forces which supported the retention of the job colour bar on the mines. But this same organization was shortly afterwards to play an important role in pioneering the concept of immediate majority rule, and in elaborating an integrated appreciation of the relationship of class to national struggle.

The same process of radicalization occurred in the organizations of the Indian minority. The early beginnings of resistance by the Indian community had been led by Mahatma Gandhi who founded the Natal and Transvaal organizations that later merged to form the South African Indian Congress. Gandhi pioneered the technique of passive resistance which was to be used so effectively in the following half-century by the whole national movement as a means of mobilization and resistance. But, like the early leaders of the African national movement Gandhi still had illusions about the nature of the British Empire and was unable to see an imperative need for all-black unity. In 1906, for example, he considered it tactically wise to side with the British in the brutal crushing of the Bambata rebellion. When the Dadoo-Naicker group won the leadership battle in the late forties, the South African Indian Congress and its constituents turned from former moderate and sectional policies to joint action with the African National Congress.

Early organizations of the Coloured people, such as the African People's Organization, also suffered similar limitations.

The partial Coloured franchise of those times, now totally abolished, proved to be more demoralizing than total disenfranchisement. Coloured politicians tended to become appendages of white parties, which denied them membership and rewarded them with scraps of political loot'.<sup>6</sup> But, by the fifties, the newly-created Coloured People's Congress was becoming an integral part of the liberation alliance.

A brief examination of a few of the main phases in the history of two of these organizations - the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress will help to relate some of their earlier ideological limitations to the realities of the period in which they occurred. It will also shed light on the mutual interaction between the national and the class movements from which evolved those strategic perspectives common to the whole liberation movement today.

## **THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY**

The Communist Party held its founding conference on 30 July 1921. Like many of its counterparts, especially in Western Europe, it was constituted by those who had broken with social democracy on the question of its support for the First World War. Initially, in 1915, a small group of left-wingers, led by people like Bill Andrews, broke with the all-white South African Labour Party and formed the International Socialist League. This group, together with smaller left-wing groups, took the initiative in

establishing the Party and affiliating it to the Comintern. The Party operated as a legal body until 1950, when it was declared illegal under the Suppression of Communism Act. After a lapse of three years, it reconstituted itself in clandestine conditions. The most concise and all-round definition of its theory of the South African revolution is contained in its programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*, which was adopted in 1962 at its sixth underground conference held in Johannesburg.

Between the first conference in 1921 and the programme conference in 1962, a fundamental re-shaping had taken place in the Communist approach to many of the basic problems of the South African revolution. Some of these changes were responses to a changing situation; but in the case of others, the changing situation served only to put in question some of the Party's earlier assumptions about the fundamental character of the political conflict, about the main forces for change, and about the precise character and role of the Party itself.

The composition of the delegates attending and of the leading bodies elected at these two conferences tells its own story. At the 1921 conference every delegate was white, and so was every member of the executive. At the 1962 conference the great majority of the delegates were black, and a predominantly black Central Committee was elected.

But the contrast between the main programmatic documents is equally stark. The earlier conference posited, as an immediate task, an advance to a classless society, with the industrial workers - then predominantly white - providing the 'storm troops' of the approaching revolution. The 1962 programme, however, set out a perspective of a national democratic revolution whose main content would be the liberation of the African people. Radical change must have seemed closer to the delegates in 1921, in the post-October Revolution euphoria, than it seemed in 1962. And indeed, shortly after the founding conference, the white miners on the Rand initiated a strike which developed close to insurrection, in which armed commandos took to the streets and pitched battles between them and the state's armed forces took place.

But with the benefit of hindsight there can surely be no situation more bizarre. The red flag is hoisted over the Johannesburg city hall. A huge demonstration of miners takes to the streets on 7 February 1922, led by a brass band blaring the Red Flag, and followed by a slogan which proclaimed 'Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa'. The Rand Revolt, as it became known, was sparked off by an attempt by the Chamber of Mines to ease - for its own purposes and in a limited sphere - the job colour bar on the mines. The employment of black mineworkers to do skilled or semi-skilled work was not yet prohibited by law. The 1917 *status quo* agreement between the mine owners and the white workers had fixed the ratio of white to black labour. Whilst attempting to steer the strike away from its anti-black tendencies, Communists found themselves arguing the true interests of the workers (white or black) were

to defend the white monopoly of skilled work and thus to defend rates of white workers' pay which the bosses were attacking by their ploy. They declared that the leaders of what they called die 'bourgeois National Congress', by advocating the immediate removal of the colour bar, were 'playing the game of the capitalists'.<sup>7</sup>

The Communists were undoubtedly right in questioning the motives behind the mine-owners' attempt to dilute the colour bar. But in the absence of an alternative demand for the immediate ending of the race quotas, their actions and attitudes objectively reinforced and 'justified' the retention of the colour bar.

What explains this association of the Communists at that time with a movement whose proclaimed aim was to entrench white racial privilege at the point of production? Given their thesis of class struggle in which the national element played little or no part and given the overwhelmingly white composition of the Communist movement at that time, it is easy to understand why they thought of the white working class as *the* revolutionary force. After all, the white workers had been engaged for more than a decade in bitter class struggles against the bosses and had fought many heroic battles, occasionally with guns in hand. In contrast, the African proletariat proper was still in its formative stages. If, as they understood it, the working class was the vanguard in the struggle for socialism, who but the most articulate and most highly organized sector of the working class could be seen to fill this role? The racial prejudice of the white workers was evident; but, it was believed, the industrial system would gradually wean them away from racialism, and a truly international class consciousness would emerge in the course of struggle.

It was, of course, exceedingly difficult for these early Communists - many of them utterly selfless in the cause of socialism - to uncover the true character of the process that was taking place. The white workers had not yet won the place at the ruler's table which they have today, and their undoubted militancy was a mixture of motives and aims, that included a class hostility to capitalism. From their struggles were born the radical political movements with broadly socialist orientation which, as we have seen, led ultimately to the formation of the Communist Party of South Africa. On the other hand, the black worker had neither effective industrial organization nor a militant national consciousness or national movement which could hold out an immediate prospect of revolutionary struggle.

South African Communists were not alone in believing that on a world scale the early twenties would see a major revolutionary breakthrough. With hindsight it is easier to see that their perspective of a working-class power, based as it could only be on the white working class, was a mistaken one. Their internationalism expressed itself in the concept of a white proletariat taking power -and then proceeding to free South Africa's oppressed nations. Rigid adherence to this concept led to political stances which, however well-intentioned, were objectively at best utopian, and at worst a pandering to white reaction.



The victory of the alliance between the white South African Labour Party and the Nationalist Party at the polls in 1924 was the real culmination of the strivings of the privilege-seeking white workers. The basic aims of the 1922 strike were given statutory recognition. The new government made vast concessions, and the process of making the white workers appendages of the ruling group in every sphere of life - economic, political and social - began in earnest. Laws were passed effectively making skilled work a right of white workers alone. A so-called 'civilized labour policy' was implemented to maintain Africans as unskilled cheap labour and to prevent the emergence of an organised African working class. Africans (i.e. all who were obliged to carry passes) were excluded from the definition of 'employee' in the new industrial legislation. This deprived them of the legal right to strike (in any industrial dispute) or to form their own registered trade unions.

The faith in the revolutionary potential of the white working class soon began to fade within the Communist movement. Those who had never really envisaged a socialism to embrace the black people withdrew from politics, or found a home in the racist Labour Party, or in a few cases in the fascist-oriented Nationalist Party. But men like Andrews - not without personal difficulty on some issues - continued to play a leading role in the Party, whose emphasis was swinging towards African liberation. By 1928, of the 1,750 members of the Communist Party, 1,600 were African.

For the first time the concept of Black Rule was advanced. James La: Guma, a Coloured leader of the Communist Party, attended the 1927 Brussels conference of the League Against Imperialism which asserted the doctrine of 'Africa for the Africans'. From there he went to Moscow. In the course of this visit the basis was laid for the Comintern to formulate its line on South Africa, the adoption of which, in terms of Comintern rules, was obligatory on the South African Party. This line proclaimed that the main task of the revolution was to struggle for what it called an 'independent native republic (with minority rights) as a stage towards the overthrow of capitalism in South Africa'.

As with the modern-day slogan of black power, the 'Native Republic' slogan was calculated to dissolve traditional African subservience to whites. The attainment of equality was dependent not upon white goodwill but African power: as far as it went a very sound thesis, which not only brought about a revolution in the thinking of Communists but also helped transform the very character of the national movement itself. But the pendulum had swung to an opposite position and the correct balance of a revolutionary strategy was still lacking.

The Party now saw the struggle as a colonial one with Africans of all classes fighting for self-determination and aiming at the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic. This was the era of the so-called 'Black Republic'. Work amongst workers of other sections declined and almost exclusive attention was paid to mobilizing Africans in the struggle for freedom and independence.

This approach obviously had difficulties of its own. Was South Africa a colony in the accepted sense? From whom was independence to be wrested? From the South African ruling class? From the imperialists in Britain who were economically dominant in South Africa? Against whom was the main blow to be directed? <sup>8</sup>

Thus, although the slogan of a Black Republic was, by and large, a move in the right direction, there were deficiencies in the exposition which, not for the first time in the experience of revolutionary movements, mechanically divided the phases of social change into rigid chronological categories. In the early period the perspective had been one purely of class struggle, led by the organized whites and leading to a workers' and peasants' republic which would then set about solving the national problems. In the later period the emphasis was in an exactly opposite direction; on the achievement of full equality and democratic rights as a distinct phase, after which the search for socialist solutions of South Africa's other ills could begin.

In the 1962 programme the synthesis of these two positions is completed. This synthesis is based on the concept that it is just as impossible to conceive of workers' power in South Africa separated from national liberation, as it is to conceive of true national liberation separated from the destruction of capitalism.

This more fully worked out ideological integration of these two elements in South Africa's strategy of struggle owes a great deal to black Communists like Moses Kotane (the Secretary General of the Communist Party since 1939 and a top-level leader of the ANC since the early forties) and Dr Yusuf Dadoo (Chairman of the Communist Party and one of the most prominent leaders of the Indian community). In the bands of revolutionary activists of their calibre, the practical Party campaigns to mobilize people on issues close to their experience injected an indigenous revolutionary vitality into what had, for some time in the 1930s, remained a somewhat sterile exercise in theory.

## **THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS**

But if the early Communist Party suffered from the twin legacy of its genesis in the white labour movement and its unreal belief in the immediate prospect of a working-class breakthrough in South Africa, the new national organization remained for some time the prisoner of other limitations. The defeats of armed resistance in the countryside had been piecemeal, made easier by the enemy's manipulation of one tribe against another. The bulk of the African people remained tied to these demoralized tribal groupings; in the urban centres new black forces for change were still in their infancy. It was to be some time before the economic and political processes matured sufficiently to create a common all-African experience of oppression and exploitation which would cut across tribal boundaries.

Understandably the initiatives to develop a single national consciousness out of all the diverse groups and cultures came from the small group of black intellectuals, for whom a wider world had begun to open beyond the narrow confines of tribal allegiances. Writing in IMVO on 24 October 1911, a young Natal lawyer, P. Ka. I. Seme, advocated the formation of a national organization dedicated to creating unity amongst Africans.

'The demon of racialism,' wrote *Seme*,

the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basotho and every other native, must be buried and forgotten. We are one people. These divisions and jealousies are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today.

Those who, on 8 January 1912, responded to this call, took a revolutionary step forward when they created the South African Natives' Congress. Revolutionary? The composition of the delegates and certain of the political platforms adopted may suggest otherwise. Traditional rulers and chiefs and the few black intelligentsia dominated the proceedings and the elected leadership. Inspired by the Westminster constitutional model, an 'upper house' of chiefs was created to share the leadership. Amongst the policies adopted were those 'to encourage a spirit of loyalty to the British Crown and all lawful authority' and 'to bring about better understanding between the white and black inhabitants'.

For many decades after its formation, cap-in-hand nationalism formed 'a part of Congress's ideological stance, even when it was engaging in radical actions. 'Congress fought the 1913 Land Act (the first all-Union statute to legitimize the Reserve system) by sending a deputation to London. In election speeches for one of the African seats in the Cape Provincial Council, one of the Congress Vice-Presidents, the Rev. Walter Rubusana, was still acknowledging on behalf of his people the superiority of the white race. Rallies in 1919 ended in the singing of *Rule Britannia* and *God Save the King*. In 1923 the Congress restricted itself to demanding 'equal rights for all civilized men', the notorious Rhodes formula for assuring white rule while assuaging the liberal conscience. In 1928, when the Communists were already talking of an 'Independent Native Republic' as a stage towards socialism, the Congress upper house of chiefs passed a motion disapproving of the growing 'fraternization' between the ANC and the Communist Party, swayed by the argument 'of the proposer that 'the Tsar was a great man in his country, of royal blood like us chiefs, and where is he now?'

As with the first years of the South African Communist Party, it is facile to judge this phase in the life of the African National Congress by standards of abstract revolutionary formulae, and to allow the examples of moderation and conciliation quoted above to overshadow the organization's overall revolutionary significance.

Bringing the important chiefs together under one national umbrella was a great stride forward, even though their traditions, as resistance leaders were being rapidly overtaken by their integration as minor cogs in the white man's administrative apparatus. It meant that new ideas of non-tribal politics could begin to seep through to the African people, most of whom were still living in a tribal environment. The absence of a militant strategy for the destruction of the white state reflected the reality of black powerlessness; it encouraged a lingering and desperate illusion that divisions between British and Boer imperialism - had they not just fought a war? - could somehow be exploited to win Whitehall support for advancing black aspirations.

But even in those early stages ANC politics were not totally confined to conciliation, deputation and petition. Five ANC leaders were amongst the eight accused (the other three were members of the ISL) charged with incitement to violence in a trial arising out of the strike by Johannesburg black sanitary workers (the 'bucket strike') in 1918. The ANC was involved in the strike by 40,000 black miners in February 1920, and its rally in support of this strike was broken up by armed force. In March of the same year it organized a passive resistance campaign against the Pass Laws, which led to more than 700 arrests. And in the 1922 white miners' General Strike, Congress sensed more clearly than the Communists the essentially retrogressive implications of the white miners' 'class'-inspired opposition to a dilution of the works Colour Bar.

But it was not until the forties that the ANC outgrew its moderate leaders and began to free itself from the limitations of its formative period. The first leap forward was marked by the 1943 adoption of its 'African Claims' and 'Bill of Rights'. The ANC President-General, Dr A. B. Xuma, declared that Africans had an 'undisputed claim to full citizenship'. But the radical strategy for pressing this claim only emerged four years later, when the ANC adopted its Programme of Action, which asserted an absolute right to black self-determination. A Council of Action was appointed to implement the programme by methods which were to include boycott, strikes, civil disobedience and non-co-operation.

This radicalization resulted from the interaction between changes in the socio-economic structures and a range of subjective factors. The first major spurt towards black urbanization took place in the post-First World War period, when the ANC was not yet ready to break out of its 1912 elitist mould. As a consequence it was effectively eclipsed by the newly-formed Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICU), a trade union movement for African workers which proclaimed direct political aims, including national liberation and the establishment of a socialist South Africa.

The Second World War and the consequent industrial boom accelerated the process of black urbanization. The focus of the struggle for social change, more clearly than ever before, moved to the cities, where the relatively detribalized black proletariat became the vital force in liberation politics. White intransigence was also reaching a climax with

the election of a Nationalist Party government in 1948 dedicated to the complete destruction of black opposition and to the reversal of any trend towards African national cohesion.

The militant nationalists in the youth section of Congress (ANCYL) responded to the new conditions. In 1948 a number of the moderates were displaced and men like Tambo, Sisulu and Mandela elected to the executive. Together with Communists in the ANC leadership like Kotane, Marks and Mofutsanyana they won support for more dynamic policies, and more radical political action to back them up. This set the scene for the rousing mass struggles of the fifties, and these struggles, in turn, set the scene for the complete 1961 break with the period in which resistance politics stopped short of violent revolution.

## **THE MASS STRUGGLES OF THE FIFTIES**

Starting from nation-wide strikes on 26 June 1950, to protest at the May-Day police killings of demonstrators against the Suppression of Communism Act,\* the fifties were punctuated by an unprecedented series of mass struggles in the urban and rural areas.

*\*This Act outlawed the SACP, introduced the offence of 'Statutory Communism' (which covered all radical opposition to racism), and gave the executive arbitrary powers to deal administratively with individuals and groups in the whole liberation opposition.*

In 1952 a Defiance Campaign against selected racial laws was launched; in the course of it 8,000 volunteers in every part of the country were jailed for deliberately flouting apartheid measures. Following upon this campaign, a nation-wide movement was launched to convene a 'Congress of the People'. After sixteen months of public campaigning, over 3,000 delegates met in Kliptown, Johannesburg, and, surrounded by armed police, this, the most representative assembly ever held in South Africa, adopted the *Freedom Charter*.

When the COP campaign was announced by Chief Albert Lutuli, the President-General of the ANC, on 8 May 1954, he also called for a separate campaign of resistance to all apartheid measures. Amongst the acts of resistance subsequently advocated was the campaign against the removal of Africans from Sophiatown in 1955 (the only area in Johannesburg in which Africans still enjoyed freehold rights); and the boycott of all Government-controlled schools as a protest against the implementation of the 1953 Bantu Education Act.

On 6 December 1956, 156 leaders (Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites) were arrested in nation-wide swoops and charged with high treason arising out of their involvement in the Congress of the People and other campaigns. The trial was to end in favour of the accused over four years later. 1956 also saw a major women's anti-pass

campaign which involved the burning of passes and led to thousands of arrests. In more than one urban centre militant bus boycotts were organized in protest against rising fares, and whole townships (like Alexandra in Johannesburg) marched in daily demonstrations through white suburbs to reach their places of work. For the first time in South African history, national general strikes were called for political purposes. Time and again the big industrial complexes of the Witwatersrand, the Eastern Cape, Natal and, elsewhere were seriously disrupted as hundreds of thousands of black workers went on strike in support of political demands.

In the countryside, too, a new militancy was in evidence. In Sekhukhuniland partly-armed peasants doggedly resisted government attempts to integrate the chieftanship more closely into the Government's apparatus. In Zululand, similar resistance developed. In Zeerust, pass burning by women was followed by a period of violent clashes between people and police. In Pondoland, peasant resistance reached the most impressive heights: the sizeable popular movement set up its own unofficial administrative units, including People's Courts. The movement took its name 'Intaba' (the mountain) from the spot where thousands of peasants assembled illegally to decide their own actions. Many of these peasant eruptions were spontaneous, but all were stimulated by the new climate of organized mass resistance. The Pondo Revolt, for example, had its origins in purely local grievances, but it soon embraced the platform of the African National Congress - the attainment of full political rights for the oppressed majority.<sup>9</sup>

## **THE PRELUDE TO VIOLENCE**

Measured by the yardstick of immediate achievement, each of these campaigns against specific measures failed. The laws selected as the targets of the Defiance Campaign remained on the statute book. Sophiatown was bulldozed into the ground and replaced by a white suburb which (with typical white insensitivity) was given the name of Triomf (triumph). The attempt by Congress to provide alternative education for African children through cultural clubs eventually collapsed (unofficial schools were outlawed), and the Bantu Education Act was fully implemented. Anti-pass actions did not, in the end, prevent the more intense application of the pass laws. Peasant resistance was to be crushed by emergency legislation and military action. And the strikes did not loosen the hold of white supremacy.

But 'failure' measured in such narrow terms has been the universal experience of every revolutionary movement. Until the moment of successful revolutionary take-over, each individual act of resistance usually fails, and is often crushed; and the radical demands of political action remain unsatisfied. In this sense 'failure' is the constant companion of all political endeavour by a dominated group which is not yet capable of winning power. The rare moment in history which makes possible the final victorious revolutionary assault is a compound of many elements. Amongst the most important of these is a people and a movement with an accumulated heritage of resistance

which, through all the immediate 'failures', perpetuates and reinforces the tradition of struggle. It is often only through the experience of these so-called 'failures' that the masses begin to understand the need for conquering state power and thus for revolution. And when the moment of revolution arrives, only a political organization which has been with the people through all their earlier experiences can hope to command their allegiance.

The immediate tactical aims articulated by the Congress movement in the fifties did not yet raise directly the concept of violent revolution, although the demands increasingly centred on the issue of majority rule implicit in the slogan of 'one man one vote'.

Each one of these campaigns was met with varying degrees of violent repression from government forces. Yet the organizers attempted throughout to steer mass activity along non-violent lines, while not shirking the need for constant, direct confrontation.

The decision to prepare deliberately for armed struggle was not taken until the early sixties. Why was the decision taken only then and not in the fifties or forties or thirties? There had never been a moment in history since 1652 when the white ruling class would have given up power without a battle outside the polite arena of the white man's parliament. The answer is that the conditions which make violence a revolutionary imperative had still to mature.

The revolutionary sounding phrase does not always reflect a revolutionary policy, and revolutionary sounding policies not always the springboard for revolutionary advance. Indeed what appears to be 'militant' and 'revolutionary' can often be counter-revolutionary. It is surely a question whether, in the given concrete situation, the course or policy advocated will aid or impede the prospect of the conquest of power... Untimely, ill-planned or premature manifestations of violence impede and do not advance the prospect for revolutionary change and are clearly counter-revolutionary. It is obvious, therefore, that policy and organisational structures must grow out of the real situation if they are not to become meaningless clichés.<sup>10</sup>

The answer to the central question of whether violence should have been on the agenda from the early fifties cannot be plucked out of a collection of textbook models. A serious movement poses the idea of revolution seriously only when the objective conditions make it possible to prepare for it. Until then it can articulate the idea of a revolution *ad nauseam* (as many obscure revolutionary groups do to small effect but their own gratification) without advancing *the* revolution one jot.

Conditions for armed struggle are not brought into existence by subjective and ideological activity alone; they grow out of the real situation both locally and internationally. Already by the early fifties, the increasing use of state violence to frustrate every level of organized black protest, stimulated thought and action in the

direction of people's counter-violence. The defiance campaign ended in bloody riots in almost every major city. The government's 'shoot first' order to the police led to regular killings of demonstrators and strikers who, more than once, retaliated with rudimentary weapons. In the rural areas (particularly in Pondoland) the struggles against the imposition of Bantu Authorities were accompanied by a great deal of violence. The evidence at the Treason Trial showed that more and more ANC activists were, in their speeches, reflecting the people's groping towards a strategy of retaliation in kind. But the longer-term problem for the revolutionary movement was how to express this changing mood in terms of armed rather than spontaneous violent activities, a people's war rather than mere retaliation or self-defence. For, a number of reasons such a strategy could not be effectively projected during the fifties. Any attempt to do so would have given the regime a pretext (which it clearly sought at the time) for a massive attempt at intimidation. Also, the possibilities of legal and semi-legal mass mobilization by a Congress movement still enjoying a precarious legality had not yet been completely blocked. Both at important levels of the liberation alliance and amongst sections of the people a belief lingered in the potential of mass pressure short of organized force.

In the rest of the continent, black self-rule had not yet become a reality, nor were there in existence friendly external base areas (within reasonable reach) such as proved to be of undoubted importance in the launching and sustaining of armed struggle in countries like Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Without even the prospect of such base areas until the late fifties and early sixties, preparations for modern-type guerrilla struggle seemed unrealistic; and even more so in a situation where, almost uniquely, the black people were absolutely barred from access to weaponry even in the army, or to any modern combatant experience or know-how. The crushing of the tribal armed resistance by means of unequal material odds was still fresh in the collective memory of the African people, and the example of successful armed challenges to colonialism in Africa (as in Algeria) by new techniques of people's war had still not made its impact.

But it was not only the sweep of African decolonization which provided the spur for a more radical strategy. When the movement began to alter the emphasis of its approach, it was reflecting the more militant political climate which it had itself helped bring about inside South Africa by the radical leadership it had provided in the preceding period. The decision of the -Planning Council in 1952 to call for a *defiance* campaign, and not a *passive* resistance campaign, was calculated. It was a conscious attempt to begin promoting defiance of the white state, and was certainly 'not designed to end the system of white supremacy by the sacrifices of its victims'.<sup>11</sup>

Although immediately directed against selected laws, the longer term purpose was clearly expressed in the letter written by the President and Secretary General of the African National Congress to the government when the campaign was announced:



We firmly believe that the freedom of the African people, the elimination of the exploitation of man by man and the restitution of democracy, liberty and harmony in South Africa, are such vital and fundamental matters that the Government and the public must know that we are fully resolved to achieve them in our lifetime.

Deliberate defiance by selected volunteers was to be the first phase of the campaign. A later phase was to be 'mass action, which as far as possible should broaden out on a countrywide scale...'.<sup>12</sup>

The Congress of the People, the pass-burning campaigns, the demand for majority rule backed by the general political strike: all these were designed to inject a spirit of organized defiance and to show the need of state power for realizing the new vision of South Africa as set out in the *Freedom Charter*. Certainly the ruling class understood the strategy in these terms when it eventually moved to destroy the leadership with the charges of high treason: and, when that miscarried, through the outlawing of the African National Congress.

The conduct of campaigns in a way which would narrow the enemy's opportunities for violent retaliation against a people not yet equipped to fight back was also calculated. A call for physical assault on white power at that stage would have perhaps been answered by the advance guard. But it would have isolated the advance guard from the people and enabled the authorities to pick them off separately. Under these circumstances the call would be stifled before the masses even began to respond.

The emphasis placed by the leaders of the movement on nonviolence no doubt fed those reformist tendencies rooted in the earlier period and may well have given rise to some illusions of possible constitutional advance. Against this danger the movement may not have guarded sufficiently. But the overall strategy can as little be condemned on this score, as can the strategy of violence because of the risks it may run of encouraging adventurism and heedlessness of the political factors. The strategic turning point came in the early sixties, because that was approximately the time when the ruling class made clear its intention of smashing the black opposition totally: that was the time when it finally sealed off all avenues for effective opposition without the clement of organized force.

## **THE CONGRESS ALLIANCE**

The decade of the fifties was also the high point of active collaboration between the mass organizations of the different groups constituting the Congress Alliance. The Communist Party, already outlawed, could not, for obvious reasons, be formally associated with it. The Joint Planning Council which coordinated the Defiance Campaign was followed by a National Consultative Committee (NCC), which consisted of representatives of the African National Congress, South African Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress, South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Congress

of Democrats (a white group created on the initiative of the African National Congress during the Defiance Campaign). The NCC was not a super-executive. As the name implies, it was consultative in character, formed to co-ordinate the efforts of the organizations which were part of it. Critics of this Congress Alliance, such as the Pan-Africanist Congress, echoed government allegations that it was infiltrated by communist elements and saw participation by the minority groups as a dilution of the 'African image'. But on neither count can the charge be sustained.

The leading Communists who participated at the top level of the Congress Alliance - men like Kotane, Dadoo, J. B. Marks and Mofutsenyana - did so in their capacity as long-standing leaders of the national organizations. They did not hide their political affiliations but won their leading status by long and active participation in the organizations in which they had been elected to high positions.

The South African Communist Party saw its role in relation to the national movement as follows:

South African experience has fully proved that a strong Communist Party is vital to the strength and the vigour of the movement as a whole. The Central Committee is vigorously opposed to any conception of counterposing the Party or 'the Communists' to the rest of the movement. We have never considered that the way to play a 'vanguard' role is by 'proclaiming' it or by contesting for positions. In the fight against White supremacy we have no aims separate from those of our non-communist comrades and colleagues in the liberation and working-class movements. Leadership consists in each and every one of our members, in whatever field he may be working, and at whatever level, setting an example of firmness and devotion in the common patriotic struggle against the common enemy. We maintain that our ideology of Marxism-Leninism enables our members to be better Congressites, better trade unionists, better fighters for the freedom of our country. We maintain that the movement as a whole can only gain by our Party Playing its full role as a partner in the liberation alliance.<sup>13</sup>

The charge of minority domination of the Alliance is equally groundless. There are moments

... after 1960 in which co-operation between some organizations which were legal (e.g. SAIC, CPC, COD) and those that were illegal (e.g. ANC) sometimes led to the superficial impression that the legal organizations - because they could speak and operate more publicly and thus more noticeably - may have had more than their deserved place in the leadership of the Alliance.<sup>14</sup>

But in general the ANC was undoubtedly the leading organization in the Alliance, and was recognized as such by the other organizations in it.

Rhetoric apart, the PAC was to show in practice that it was not so much opposed to participation by minority groups in the national liberation struggle as to the left

ideological positions held by many of the leaders of the SAIC, CPC and COD. Its real objection to the broad alliance was made clear by Leballo (the present PAC leader in exile) in 1958:

The African people do not want to be allied with the Congress of Democrats. They know these people to be leftists and when they want to fight for our rights these people weaken us. This is so because they use campaigns for their own ends and *also because the government will not listen to our requests and demands because of their outlook\** (my emphasis).<sup>15</sup>

*\*Soon after its formation, the PAC was to count amongst its leaders and external representatives men like Patrick Duncan - a right-wing member of the SA Liberal Party, who edited Contact which devoted its columns to memorials to 'the victims of Mau Mau terrorism' (27 December 1958), to supporting 'peaceful arrangement of affairs with the ex-colonial powers' (13 December 1958), and to supporting US military action against the Chinese People's Republic (18 October 1958).*

In contrast to those who feared that minority participation was diluting the 'African image' of the struggle, others like the Non-European Unity Movement raised theoretical objection to what it called 'voluntary segregation' of the black community into separate national organizations.

Apart from the Communist Party and SACTU (with class rather than national roots), membership of each of the constituent organizations of the Congress Alliance was effectively restricted to individuals belonging to the different communities. The idea of creating a single mass organization to struggle against white rule accords with the general truth that all black groups suffer from race exploitation. Indeed, the ideologically advanced could have no principled objection to the inclusion even of committed white supporters into one movement. But a single liberation organization cannot be established by 'advanced decisions' from the top, and organizations like the Non-European Unity Movement which attempted to move in that direction never made an impact in the country on any significant scale.

Historically, as we have seen, each group gave birth to its own national movement the explanation for this must be sought in the fact that coloureds and Indians had not only been physically separated from each other and from the Africans, but that the oppression of each group always differed in important respects. There were therefore tendencies towards both unity and diversity - unity in response to the fundamental fact of South African life, white supremacy; diversity because of the differential techniques of domination and exploitation of each group.

Until recently a section of the Coloured and Indian people in the Western Cape had been included in the Common Voters' Roll and there have always been fewer obstacles in the way of the Coloured people engaging in skilled industrial occupations. The most

onerous racial laws - e.g. the Pass Laws which restrict freedom of movement - have never applied to Coloureds or Indians. Despite legal obstacles, a small Indian merchant class emerged and has been a significant factor in the life of that community. But apart from a petty trader clement, no analogous group exists amongst Africans or Coloureds. For both the Indian and Coloured communities, with only minimal peasant elements, the land question (except in a very limited sense for trading and residential purposes) had little direct significance.

The different levels of national consciousness, the historical legacy of separate national movements, and even some inter-black prejudices (always encouraged by the government), \* could not be made to disappear, simply by ignoring them or by ideological appeals only. It was only the active collaboration between the national organizations in the campaigns of the fifties which made possible a high level of concerted black action and thus moved the masses towards the achievement of real unity. But later events were to pose new problems in this area.

*\*In January 1949 clashes between Africans and Indians in Durban led to an estimated 142 deaths and 1,087 wounded.*

In 1960 the African National Congress was outlawed, and the period of repression which followed led to the virtual destruction of the liberation movement's organization. The SAIC and the CPC ceased to exist, either within or outside the country, in the sense of having a defined and functioning leadership with the allegiance of an organized rank and file. The COD disappeared completely. In fact, of the groups ', which once constituted the Congress Alliance, only the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party continued to operate, each with a recognized leadership and organized rank-and-file organization, even though for some years outside the country only. But the Congress Alliance in the form in which it was known in the fifties ceased to exist. The new period of internal reconstruction which followed therefore posed anew the problem of appropriate organizational forms for a united struggle in new circumstances.

## **FUTURE LIBERATION UNITY**

Broad guidelines of the ANC's approach to unity are set out in its 'Strategy and Tactics'.

Whatever instruments are created to give expression to the unity of the liberation drive, they must accommodate two fundamental propositions: *firstly*, they must not be ambiguous on the question of the primary role of the most oppressed African mass, and, *secondly*, those belonging to the other oppressed groups and those few white revolutionaries who show themselves ready to make common cause with their aspirations, must be fully integrated on the basis of individual equality.

Approached in the right spirit these two propositions do not stand in conflict but reinforce one another. Equality of participation in our national front does not mean a mechanical parity between the various national groups. Not only would this in practice

amount to inequality (again at the expense of the majority), but it would lend flavour to the slander which our enemies are ever-ready to spread of a multi-racial alliance dominated by minority groups. This has never been so and will never be so.

Therefore not only the substance but the form of our structural creations must in a way which people can see, give expression to the main emphasis of the present stage of our struggle. This approach is not a pandering to chauvinism, to racialism or to other such backward attitudes. We are revolutionaries, not narrow nationalists. Committed revolutionaries are our brothers to whatever group they belong. There can be no second-class participation in our movement. It is for the enemy we reserve our assertiveness and our justified sense of grievance.

In the councils of the OAU and especially its Liberation Committee, unity in South Africa's liberation struggle is seen by some in terms of a formal alliance between the external missions of the ANC and PAC. But FRELIMO's approach to this question was underlined by its Vice-President, Marcelino Dos Santos, in an interview:

When we speak about unity we mean, in the first place, unity of the people; not just groups who claim to represent the people. Every situation generates numerous individuals and groups who have the ambition to exploit a struggle for their own ends... Unity between organizations only has meaning if they have a real base amongst the people, otherwise it is purely formal and does not serve the interest of a people. Such a kind of unity may even serve to divide the people rather than unite them.<sup>16</sup>

The attempts in other parts of the sub-continent to impose a formal unity from the top between contending national movements has, too often, proved abortive and become a drag on real revolutionary effort.

The ANC has emphasized that today, as in the fifties, the building of a democratic front against minority domination in South Africa is a priority but can only be achieved as 'a unity in action, in the field, a genuine unity forged on the anvil of the struggle inside the country'. \*

*\*Memorandum submitted by the ANC delegation to a meeting of the OAU Liberation Committee held in 1974*

How then is such unity to be forged inside the country?

The form of the liberation alliance is not fixed. It shifts and develops to suit not only changing objective conditions, but also ideological changes amongst the masses who are constantly re-educated by political activity. In the present situation it obviously has to take into account a number of new factors. The armed wing of the liberation movement - Umkhonto We Sizwe - is overwhelmingly African in its leadership and composition but admits membership from the other groups. Some of these have already given their lives in the struggle and many others are serving long sentences in

South Africa's jails. The needs of a totally underground organization, like today's in South Africa, cannot be met by the forms which grew up when all or most were open and legal. It is obviously both impractical and inefficient to encourage a number of parallel underground organizations of Africans, Coloureds, Indians and the few white revolutionaries, each with its own leadership. Yet a place needs to be found for those revolutionaries from the minority groups who are unconditionally devoted to the liberation struggle and who are ready to participate in underground work.

In the sphere of legal political activity, there have also been new developments which bear on the future of liberation unity. The last few years have witnessed the emergence of such bodies as the Black People's Convention and the South African Students' Organization, which are predominantly African but also have some Coloured and Indian members. They have not yet defined their relation to the older liberation organizations and, generally speaking, have canvassed for support on the basis of a vaguely defined platform of 'black consciousness'. The term does not in itself express a coherent programme, still less an ideology. It is in the first place a response to the arrogance of the white supremacists; and, insofar as it encourages black assertiveness, its spread is undoubtedly a contribution to the 'psychological' liberation of the black people. Both organizations have attracted a mixture of individuals ranging from militants seeking new ways to express their radicalism, to those who had been associated with the predominantly white moderate Liberal Party.

There has been a recent attempt - hampered by government administrative measures - to revive the Indian Congress which, like the CPC is still legal, although administrative repression of its leaders and activists continues. The CPC itself seems to be completely dormant inside the country. Radical leadership of the Coloured community in the legal sphere has come from the newly-formed Coloured Labour Party which won a majority of seats in the elections to the Coloured Representative Council (yet another of the government's dummy institutions) but was deprived of control by the regime's subterfuge in handing over control to the defeated Federal Party. Most of the leaders of the Coloured Labour Party are committed to a complete rejection of this type of 'representation' and they increasingly emphasize their belief in the common fate of all the black groups.

In the trade union field a new organization - the Black Allied Workers' Union - was formed recently as an offshoot of the Black, People's Convention. From its inception, government and police measures have prevented 'normal' organizational activity, and there appears to be a decline in the rate of its growth. SACTU itself is still a long way from recovering its internal organizational strength, and it is only in the recent period that there is some evidence of revived activity on a relatively small scale. The recent impressive strike wave, involving about 200,000 workers since the beginning of 1972, was, however, semi-spontaneous in character. Although activists of both trade union organizations played important roles in some of the strikes, there was no overall centralized direction.

In the countryside, the legal political stage has been dominated by Bantustan politics; and new ethnic political groups and parties, both official and opposition, are emerging with a wide panorama of attitudes on the future of the Homelands and other issues.

It follows from this rough sketch of the new developments which are taking place, both in the area of underground activity and of legal and semi-legal opposition, that; the old type of Congress Alliance (which in its original form is in any case dead) can no longer satisfy the overall needs of liberation unity.

These needs must obviously be met by a flexible approach which accommodates these new interrelated realities and cannot be expressed in a single rigidly-defined structure. But, structures aside, it seems clear that effective liberation unity means a unity, under the overall leadership of the African National Congress, of *all* the black people, the involvement of the small group of white revolutionaries, and, above all, a recognition of the special role of South Africa's working class.

## Footnotes

### **Chapter 3: The Resistance**

1. Quoted in Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, University of Wisconsin Press. 1966, p. 40.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
3. Monica Wilson and Leonard Monteath Thompson (eds), *Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 347.
4. Cornelius W. De Kiewiet, *Imperial Factor in South Africa*, Frank Cass, 1965, p. 220.
5. Donald R. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*, Sphere 1969, p. 283.
- 6; H.J. and R\_E. Simons, *Class and Colour 1911-1950 South Africa 1850-1950*, Penguin, 1969, p. 123.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
8. Zanzolo, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
9. A detailed description of these events and their significance is contained in Govan Mbeki, *South Africa, The Peasants' Revolt*, Penguin, 1964.
10. 'Strategy and Tactics', (ANC). *op. cit.*
11. A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, Inkululeko Publications, 1971, p.96.
12. Report of Joint Planning Council, quoted in Edward Feit, *South Africa, The Dynamics of the African National Congress*, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 27. 13. Report to SACP Plenary Session of Central Committee, *African Communist*, 3rd Quarter 1968, pp. 9-10.
14. 'Strategy and Tactics', (ANC), *op. cit.*
15. *Contact*, 1 November 1958.
16. 'Frelimo Faces the Future': Interview, *African Communist*, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1973, p. 51.

#### **4 Perspectives of Armed Struggle**

On 16 December 1961 organized units of Umkhonto We Sizwe ('The Spear of The Nation' - MK) formed on the initiative of the ANC and SACP, carried out bomb attacks against Government installations in every major South African city. These attacks were the first in the modern period to give public notice that radical change would be sought by a strategy which included organized violence. There were to be over 150 acts of sabotage during the following eighteen months. In a proclamation widely distributed on the day of the first acts of sabotage, MK declared: 'The people's patience is not endless. The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices - submit or fight. That time has now come in South Africa.'

Had that time come? Was the moment of action well chosen; and, if so, was the method used appropriate? Did the leadership have a strategy other than an immediate expression of militant anger? Was the movement in a state of readiness sufficient to safeguard its units and personnel against massive enemy reprisals, which should undoubtedly have been anticipated?

In attempting to answer questions of this type, those whose vocation is only to dispense praise or censure have an obvious advantage over those who acted: the advantage of knowing the result. In Clausewitz's perceptive aphorism:

The state of circumstances from which an event proceeded can never be placed before the eye of the critic exactly as it lay before the eye of the person acting, [... because, above all ..], it is almost impossible that the knowledge of (the result) should not have an effect on the judgement passed on events which preceded it. Examining only the result of M K sabotage in its narrow immediate sense, critics who have turned their pens to this period have had a gala day. The form of violence chosen was, by its nature, restricted. Sabotage of property, even on a more sophisticated scale than M K was capable of mounting, is at best a weapon auxiliary to revolutionary armed struggle. It could neither bring about the downfall of the government, nor draw into action those not already in the fairly small conspiratorial groups of activists.

The organized beginnings of sabotage, and the semi-spontaneous terrorist outbursts of the PAC-inspired Poqo in 1962, acted however as a spur to government counter-action, culminating in blows which led to the virtual destruction of all effective levels of leadership and organization within the country.

The police raid on the Rivonia headquarters of South Africa's underground and its follow-up resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of almost the whole of the liberation movement's internal leadership and activist rank-and-file. The state security structure,



refashioned to counter threatened insurgency, succeeded in silencing all significant liberation opposition. In the period that followed, those leaders who had previously been selected for external missions together with the MK cadres sent abroad for military training, continued to make renewed efforts to get the struggle off the ground.

## **HAD THE TIME COME?**

In the early sixties, all sections of South Africa's liberation movement believed that a move towards armed struggle was a revolutionary imperative. By then the strategy of mass struggle along non-violent lines had exhausted its potential for mobilizing the people. The regime had turned to the use of undisguised terror against all militant opposition to race rule; the liberation organizations had been outlawed. These facts had put paid to any lingering illusions that radical change could be won by action which did not include armed activity.

The formal turning point from the old to the new strategy was the regime's massive mobilization of armed force to frustrate the liberation movement's last attempt in May 1961 to pursue old-style tactics, in the call for a general strike to protest against the declaration of a Republic without consulting the black majority. It became clear that old methods would no longer strike a chord amongst the people. Like the workers in Russia in the wake of the 1905 revolution, the peaceful strike and the demonstration.

ceased to satisfy the workers; they asked: what is to be done next . . . ? The proletariat sensed sooner than the leaders the change in the objective conditions of struggle . . . as is always the case practice marched ahead of theory.<sup>2</sup>

Events outside South Africa also played an important part in developing a more offensive mood amongst the people, and stimulated a search for a new strategy to destroy minority rule 'in our lifetime'.. The international isolation of South Africa was reaching a high point. In Africa itself direct imperialist control of the continent was being undermined; one country after another was obtaining independence; the prospects of self-rule were firing the imagination of people throughout Africa, the South included. Friendly borders were creeping closer to the beleaguered South and, with these, the prospect of vital practical aid from the newly emergent states. For the first time in modern Africa successful armed struggles were being waged, first in Algeria; then in Guinea-Bissau and Angola, and later in Mozambique; in these areas armed national liberation forces could be seen to be challenging enemies with overwhelmingly superior military and material resources.

Untimely inaction can often be as politically damaging as untimely action. There can be no doubt that in late 1961, failure by the ANC and its allies to make a public break with the tactics of the previous decade would have been seen by their supporters as 'inaction' - and as an abdication of their leadership role. But if a sharp break with previous tactics was called for, could the perspective of armed struggle reasonably be

placed on the agenda? And were the initial techniques for doing so adequate or correct? Before we can answer these questions, we must first consider the general place of armed tactics in the struggle for revolutionary change.

## INSURRECTION AND ARMED STRUGGLE

It is necessary to separate two distinct problems. *The first* relates to what may broadly be called 'a revolutionary situation', in which revolution involving armed uprising is properly on the agenda. The *second* relates to the use of organized violence as part of a planned build-up towards a protracted people's war. A confusion of these two concepts has sometimes prevented a revolutionary movement from seeing the revolutionary possibilities of its own situation. Recent history has provided a number of examples of revolutionary parties which rejected military activity because they did not discriminate between the separate questions, and paid dearly in consequence. In Algeria, for instance, the beginning of armed activity took the Algerian Communist Party by surprise; it regarded the launching of the national liberation war in November 1954 as premature, since 'the conditions for an armed uprising as formulated by Lenin did not exist'.<sup>3</sup>

Lenin's formulation is presumably that in '*Left-Wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder*:

*It is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living the old way and demand changes; it is essential for revolution that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way ... revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters.)*<sup>4</sup>

Lenin was here discussing the problems of a general insurrection or uprising at that time in the advanced or relatively advanced capitalist countries. He was not stating a law. He was always at pains to emphasize that the general theory and practice of communism must be adapted to specific conditions. The solution to problems of the colonial areas, 'You will not find in any communist book ... you will have to tackle that problem and solve it through your independent experience.'<sup>5</sup>

In his formulation in '*Left-Wing' Communism*, Lenin did not deal with the question of whether a vanguard organization could help create favourable conditions for the conquest of power by its own activities. He was dealing with the objective conditions themselves. But this has not always been appreciated. Of course favourable conditions for armed struggle ripen historically. But the historical process should not be regarded as a mystical force outside of man, which in a crude deterministic way sets him tasks to which he mechanically responds. Simply to sit back and await the evolution of the objective conditions for a 'revolutionary situation' can amount to a dereliction of leadership. What people in organized activities do or abstain from doing, hastens or

retards the historical process, and helps or hinders the maturing of favourable conditions for' successful armed struggle.

On the continent of Africa there have been - or are - people's armed struggles in Algeria, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. In none of these territories can it be claimed that hostilities started in a classical situation either of revolutionary crisis or when a general insurrection could be immediately anticipated. Yet a combination of internal non-armed strategy used to exhaustion, and favourable external conditions made it possible for armed activity to promote a revolutionary advance.

Although no single incident provides the sole point of departure from non-armed to armed conflict, in each country one can recognise an event or a sequence of events which dramatically signalled the need for fundamentally new approaches. In Guinea-Bissau the signal event was the bloody repression of the August 1959 strike at the Pidgiguiti docks of Bissau, in which fifty workers were killed and many injured. In Mozambique it was the 1960 Mueda massacre of 600 at a peaceful meeting. In Angola it was the killing of thirty and the wounding of 200 at a meeting in Catete to protest at the arrest of the MPLA leader Agostinho Neto, combined with brutal repression of the Maria uprising led by a militant Christian sect. In Zimbabwe serious preparations for armed struggle were prompted by the settlers' successful Unilateral Declaration of Independence, which shattered any remaining illusion that Britain might act against the interest of its 'kith and kin' to enforce majority rule. In Namibia, the turn to armed resistance occurred immediately after the abortive 1966 judgment of the International Court of Justice, when the process of international and legal pressure had been tested to its limits and found wanting.

These examples must not be taken to support the dangerous illusion that in any country in which there is severe repression, the mere injection of armed groups will of itself, and subject only to the professional skill of the armed groups, slowly spread revolution like an oil patch. They do, however, make clear that, *given certain minimum pre-conditions*, the actual commencement and continuation of violent action can hasten the development of insurrectionary conditions.\* What are these pre-conditions, particularly in a colonial-type situation?

*\*It is a matter of historical record that in many colonial countries, the commencement of organized armed activities did not take the form of an armed uprising in the classical sense; nor did it wait upon the time when it could properly be claimed that there existed a 'nation-wide crisis affecting both the exploiters and the exploited'. It would be difficult, if not altogether impossible, to find in China in the early 1920s, Algeria in 1954, or Cuba in 1958 a traditional type of revolutionary upsurge to provide a classical basis for armed activities. In these countries protracted armed activity undoubtedly played the*

*major role in bringing about the conditions for nation-wide revolutionary upsurge and eventual victory.*

*First*, disillusionment (based on hard experience), amongst the majority of the people, with the prospect of achieving liberation by traditional and non-violent processes. *Second*, the readiness of the people to respond to the call for armed confrontation, at the beginning in the form of sympathy and later with practical support. *Third*, the existence of a leadership capable not only of gaining the peoples organized allegiance for armed struggle, but of carrying out the immensely difficult tasks of planning, preparing and directing the conduct of the whole struggle.

There are, of course, other factors: such as the international context in which the struggle takes place, and. the physical possibilities (terrain, friendly borders, availability of trained personnel and arms, etc.) Whether a propitious situation exists in any given country cannot be determined solely by reference to generalized theoretical models. In each case it is for the indigenous political activists who are intimately involved in the special complexities of their situation, to assess what is possible.

Of course, no political struggle (and this is what people's armed struggle essentially is) can be taken up only on condition that its success can be guaranteed. In the South African case, some serious mistakes were made, which proved all too costly. But if assessing these mistakes is not just an exercise in criticism, but an aid to future conduct, it should avoid seeing the struggle as a purely subjective process in which all reverses are due to avoidable errors. The real world in which struggle takes place is not a laboratory model.\* We must never forget that events which are now well behind us were at one stage ahead, and that those who acted did not have then - as they have now - the benefit of experience.

*\*'World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances.' - Karl Marx in a letter to L. Kugelman, 17 April 1871.*

## **THE SIXTIES - A FORWARD LOOK**

In South Africa during the early sixties, there could not be a strategy for the immediate unleashing of an armed struggle; there was a gap between the people's disenchantment with exclusively non-violent methods, and their readiness and capacity to storm the citadels of the enemy. That gap could not be bridged merely by brave calls to action. Sabotage by selected units was therefore considered to be the proper departure point of the new liberation strategy. It was not presented as an ultimate weapon in people's war; nor as a form of physical pressure which, on its own, could gather force so as to create a climate of crisis and collapse in the enemy camp. It was designed rather to meet the specific ideological and practical needs of the new direction of struggle in the conditions of that time.

It was vital that the political leadership demonstrate that it was placing before the people new perspectives which would mark a sharp and open break with the politics of non-violent resistance that had dominated the preceding half century or more. Inside the movement the ideological momentum of the previous period was still evident. Strong voices continued to echo the hope that the old techniques could still succeed with- out resort to armed confrontation. Although calls for old-style actions were attracting a diminishing response from the people, the alternative strategy had still to gain currency. The people had experienced escalating state violence in every peaceful campaign of the fifties, and on more than one occasion had reacted with spontaneous counter-violence. But riot and head-on clash by enraged crowds with state forces was little more than a transient reflex. It did not - and could not - provide the basis for an effective armed challenge. A new approach was necessary: The strategy adopted, and the structure devised to implement it, envisaged a long term, multi-staged campaign of disciplined violence in which a hard core of trained militants, supported by mass-based political activity and crucial external aid, confront state power with the ultimate goal of seizing it.<sup>6</sup>

To lay the foundations for this strategy, the ANC and its allies publicly launched the first phase: 'controlled violence' in the form of the sabotage campaign. Politically the campaign was designed to serve a number of purposes. It would be a graphic pointer to the need for carefully planned action rather than spontaneous or terroristic acts of retaliation. And it would demonstrate that responsibility for the slide towards bloody civil war lay squarely with the regime. A proclamation accompanying the first sabotage acts declared:

We of Umkhonto We Sizwe have always sought to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We hope, even at this late hour, that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realization of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war.<sup>7</sup>

However forlorn the hope, its expression - backed up by a form of violence which deliberately avoided the taking of life was a politically useful bridge between the period of non-violent campaigning and the future people's armed struggle.

But another need had also to be met. If the armed tactic was to play a part in the political struggle, it was necessary to begin building a revolutionary armed force, under the overall leadership and direction of the political movement but with a distinctive apparatus and function. The sabotage campaign thus became a proving ground for establishing which activists of the existing organizations could make the

transitions to the new tactics; and, by means of these acts of armed propaganda, the atmosphere was created in which other young militants would be inspired to join.

That sabotage was to form only the opening phase in the unfolding of armed struggle is revealed by other steps which were taken at the same time. Before MK was formed, leading personnel had been sent out of the country to be trained in the art of guerrilla struggle. An intensive drive had been initiated for the recruitment of large numbers of other cadres; and an underground railway had been set up which carried hundreds of recruits abroad for guerrilla-type instruction. Early in 1962 almost immediately after the beginnings of sabotage – Nelson Mandela had toured Africa and Europe to obtain support for the armed struggle and training facilities for guerrillas; efforts afterwards continued by the external missions of the ANC and its allies.

At the same time the National High Command of MK elaborated an ambitious plan to prepare for the next phase, the initiation of guerrilla warfare. The plan envisaged the establishment of MK regions in urban and rural areas, each with full time organizers. It included the mobilization of both home and foreign resources to enable trained personnel with their equipment to return to chosen strategic areas. These trained cadres, acting together with a local network which the High Command would build in the interim, would form the hard-core of guerrilla activity. Emphasis would be placed on the country areas in the initial stages. All these technical and organizational measures would be accompanied by an intensive campaign of mass mobilization by the political organizations which, for tactical reasons, did not yet publicly admit M K to be their creation. The precise timing of guerrilla action would depend on implementation of the preparatory steps, although the euphoric mood led to unreal expectations.

The draft document (Operation Mayibuye) which set out the main elements of the plan emphasized that the struggle ahead was likely to be protracted, and that there would be tremendous difficulties in acting against a state which was powerfully armed and could rely on the support of the indigenous white population. But it declared, 'the time for small thinking is over because history leaves us no choice'. The successful beginnings of guerrilla warfare could well lead to a collapse of the state structure 'far sooner than we can at the moment envisage'. As it turned out, that speculation could not be tested. Although some aspects of the strategy contained in Operation Mayibuye were implemented - the most successful being the training abroad of large groups of MK cadres - it is now a matter of history that its main purpose was completely frustrated; and the enemy's reprisals rendered the whole movement abysmally weak in the years that followed.

It is vital to identify the main reasons why this happened, not merely for purposes of historical record, but because the experiences have obvious relevance to present day endeavours. Given the imperative of armed struggle in South Africa, the broad conception behind the plan cannot be faulted. The plan had been prepared by the MK High Command and its details were still being discussed by the political leadership

when it was captured at Rivonia. Whether then, now, or in the future, there can be no strategy for commitment to guerrilla-type struggle in South Africa without the main steps which the plan envisaged: the training of sufficient skilled military personnel which, in the absence of liberated areas, could only be effectively done outside the country; their return to selected regions; their equipment with a reserve of weapons to sustain operations in the initial period; and the preparation of organized political and military support for them amongst the people, especially in the areas selected for the first actions. Indeed, this was the pattern in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique, and also of the beginnings of armed conflict in Zimbabwe and Namibia. But it is now clear that the objective obstacles to the implementation of such a plan in the 1963 South African situation were not properly appreciated.

## THE EXTERNAL FACTORS

In the special conditions in which struggles on the African continent have had to be initiated and pursued, the external element was and continues to be a crucial factor. The support of the socialist world and of contiguous countries (as, for example, Guinea next door to Guinea-Bissau; Tanzania and Zambia adjoining Mozambique and Angola; the Caprivi Strip as an entry point to Namibia; and the liberated territories of Mozambique for freedom fighters striking into Rhodesia) has enabled the liberation movements to start the early phases of armed struggle sooner than would otherwise have been possible. In each of these territories; the initial phases of armed action could not have been organized from inside the countries themselves. Leaderships had to be constituted externally, and in this opening phase, supplies and trained personnel had to flow into the country from outside.

In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the decisive step was the installation of a leadership group in the newly independent Republic of Guinea in 1961, where the basic PAIGC 'core, both political and military, was formed.<sup>8</sup> For Angola it was only after Congo-Brazzaville granted haven to the MPLA leadership in 1963, following the overthrow of the puppet French regime of Abbe Yulou, that MPLA was able to begin in earnest the long task of reconstructing their forces in friendly territory.<sup>9</sup> Another decisive breakthrough was the opening of the Eastern Front made possible by Zambian support. In the case of Mozambique, the early beginnings of FRELIMO were at a congress in Tanzania in 1962 of three organizations, all exile-based. Tanzanian facilities, encouragement and unstinting support contributed immeasurably to FRELIMO's ability to begin guerrilla struggle and to sustain it for ten years.

In the South African case there were not then in existence any contiguous friendly states with the capacity to risk open confrontation with the strong racist regime. South Africa was surrounded by a *cordon sanitaire* of states which stood in alliance with white supremacy or, like Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, were still hostages to its economic and military power. For the liberation movement this made the vital link between internal and external resources extremely complex. As it turned out,

this complexity was underestimated; and, at the same time, the prospects of assistance from independent Africa on the required scale were overestimated. Indeed, the O AU had to accommodate itself to a unity which incorporated disparate levels of commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle. As a consequence, the ANC often received less assistance and facilities than the amount needed to implement its projects. It thus found itself in the vicious circle where its inability to begin armed actions was used as a justification for only lukewarm support, which in turn, made the task even more difficult.

Also over-optimistic was the assessment of the likely effect of the campaign to isolate and weaken the South African regime. For example, in 1963, the SACP Central Committee claimed that:

Looked at from the viewpoint of the historical process, the South African regime is steadily and swiftly being driven into a position of isolation in which the armaments, capital and other forms of material and moral support which sustain it from abroad will one after another be cut short.<sup>10</sup>

Though the level of its own support was thus overestimated, the tenacity of external imperialist economic and military support for the racist regime was under-estimated.

## **THE INTERNAL FACTORS**

Although of some importance, the external factor is only one aspect of the problem. It is obvious that both then and now the progress of the struggle depends essentially upon political organization within the country and its capacity to mobilize internal revolutionary energies.

But every attempt to raise a struggle to a higher level involves new complexities and creates new dangers for both the organization and its membership. In answer to those who looked only to the organizational disasters which followed the armed struggle in the 1905 revolution, Lenin said:

Every new form of struggle, accompanied as it is by new dangers and new sacrifices inevitably 'disorganizes' organizations which are unprepared for this new form of struggle. Our propagandist circles were disorganized by recourse to methods of agitation. Our Committees were subsequently disorganized by recourse to demonstrations. Every military action in any war to a certain extent disorganizes the ranks of the fighters. But this does not mean that one must not fight. It means that one must learn to fight. That is all.<sup>11</sup>

He went on to point out that what would have disorganized the movement even more than organized guerrilla warfare, would have been the absence of resistance altogether. The same could well be said of South Africa. But it is nevertheless of



capital importance for the future of the South African struggle to pinpoint those errors and misjudgements which contributed to the regime's successful counter-offensive.

In retrospect the main weaknesses are now apparent. First, the movement's own security screen which had seemed adequate in the previous period (despite ten years of illegal activity, the SACP, for example, did not suffer a single casualty until 1962), proved inadequate after the regime had refashioned its own instruments to meet the new challenge. The immunity of the earlier period had bred a mood of carelessness and bravado which was, in the end, to prove costly. The majority of leaders and rank-and-filers taking part in illegal activity were well known to the authorities from the period of open public campaigning, and very few of them 'went underground' in the sense of changing their existing identities and operating under a protective security screen. Only a few, like Mandela and Sisulu, went into hiding. But even their safety was daily threatened by their regular contact with others who were equally vulnerable, but who continued to lead their normal lives.

By mid-1963 the Rivonia underground headquarters had become a point of security weakness to the whole movement. The organizational nerve centre of the struggle came to be centred around this one headquarters; and there the lines of demarcation between the political and the military organizations became impermissibly blurred. The site of headquarters became known to more and more cadres who were drawn into its Underground work. Decisions were taken from time to time to remove the headquarters, and to disperse some of its activities; but, influenced by a long period of safe operation which bred an unjustified contempt for the enemy's security police techniques, the implementation of these decisions lacked the necessary urgency. In June 1963 a well-prepared police raid on Rivonia resulted in the arrest of all the top leaders and the capture of valuable archives. This was followed by the rounding up of numerous other members of the ANC and MK whose detention and torture under the infamous 90-day law led to further successes by the security forces. South Africa's judicial framework, with all its inequalities, had up to then provided a degree of protection for those who fell into police hands. The new laws and interrogation techniques (learnt from the French army in Algeria and from the Portuguese political police) gave the security forces a charter to force information out of those detained. Many resisted bravely but the majority who were subjected to standing torture, sleep deprivation and similar methods proved unable to resist.,

Since casualties are unavoidable, it is a basic rule of conspiratorial work that the destructive effect be contained within the smallest possible limits. Those who take part in such work should obviously know only what is absolutely necessary for the performance of their tasks. This rule too was infringed, and thus successful interrogation under torture of many of those detained set up a chain reaction which made it easier for the security forces to immobilize almost every level of the movement's apparatus.

In the political sphere, too, distortions crept in. The commencement of armed struggle tends to monopolize more and more of the energies and resources of a movement, especially one unpractised in the art of the new strategy. It therefore requires a deliberate effort to ensure that the mass political and organizational factors are not, directly or indirectly, belittled. In the South Africa case, the energies and resources devoted to the planning and execution of acts of sabotage and to the military apparatus (and all its auxiliary requirements) began to affect the pace of political work amongst the people. If anything, the new strategy called for an intensification of mass propaganda and organization. In the words of Giap:

If insurrection is said to be an art, the main intent of this art is to know how to give to the struggle forms appropriate to the political situation at each stage, how to maintain the correct relation between forms of political struggle and those of armed struggle in each period. At the beginning the political struggle is the main task, the armed struggle a secondary one.<sup>12</sup>

In South Africa in the early sixties the increasing concentration of the liberation movements on military preparation helped to generate an attitude both within the organization and amongst the people that the fate of the struggle depended upon the sophisticated actions of a professional conspiratorial elite. The importance of the mass base was theoretically appreciated; but in practice mass political work was minimal. This attitude was to persist for some years after 1963 with propaganda tending to say too little about what initiatives people should be taking, and to treat them only as support groups for guerrilla units which would soon appear amongst them.

## **THE PROBLEMS OF THE POST-RIVONIA PERIOD**

A few brave efforts were made inside the country after 1963 to create a new internal structure, but in the decade that followed the task of propaganda, reconstruction and further preparations for armed activities were assumed by the exile leadership. The fact that, during this period, there was no effective leadership centre within the country also generated its own special problems: not least in the lack of intimate contact by the exile leadership with internal conditions and with the state of consciousness of the people, which effective revolutionary leadership demands.

From 1966 onwards, internal ANC and SACP propaganda once again appeared regularly, and numerous efforts were made to return trained personnel with equipment.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to filter back small groups through Botswana and other territories. Beginning in August 1967, joint ANC/ZAPU guerrilla units entered Zimbabwe. In the case of the ANC contingents, it was made plain that they were en route home but their interception by Rhodesian and South African security forces led

to armed engagements. Although the battles which were fought took place outside South African territory, this was MK's baptism of battle with South African military forces called in by Smith. By all accounts confirmed by enemy reports they acted with heroism and competence. But one of the prime reasons for the failure of this incursion by the joint ANC/ZAPU groups was that, within Zimbabwe, there was not the requisite level of internal organization, mass mobilization and mass support without which armed activity may easily be strangled. For the liberation movements, the Zimbabwe incursions once again underlined the need for careful political preparation of the population and for guerrilla groups to be integrated within the Community rather than functioning as isolated *foci*.

But if it remained true that armed tactics were a vital part of any future realistic advance in the struggle, the dilemma of timing still persisted. Experience of South Africa and other highly organized police states has shown that, until the new type of action is started, it is doubtful whether political mobilization and organization can be developed beyond a certain point. Given the disillusionment of the people with the old forms of struggle, a demonstration of the liberation movement's capacity to meet and sustain the struggle in a new way is in itself a vital way of attracting organized allegiance and support. Therefore, postponing all armed activity until political mobilization and organizational reconstruction have reached a high enough level to sustain its more advanced forms would undermine the prospects of full political mobilization itself.

Military planning, as opposed to political planning) has some mechanical aspects which inevitably require certain static assumptions to be made about the future. Creating a core of trained professional armed cadres, putting them into the field with adequate logistical support, and with adequate contact to carry them through the initial period, requires long-term planning. It cannot be an overnight response to a sudden twist in the political situation. If operations go smoothly and according to plan, the beginnings of armed action will be the result of a deliberate decision. If not, they could be triggered off prematurely) as for instance by the need of the armed group to defend itself against enemy attacks as happened in the 1967-8 Zimbabwe campaign. The exact moment when actual armed action takes place, therefore, does not always coincide with the most favourable local or national situation.

In general there can be no all-embracing formula which correlates the level of all-round readiness with the precise timing of armed actions. But, despite the degree of uncertainty inherent in this type of action, a case could be made out to show that, both in the sabotage campaign and in some of the subsequent efforts' at armed activities, insufficient internal political and organizational preparation had been made to justify the chosen timing. Historically, however, the correctness, and feasibility of this general policy decision (for armed struggle) were not, and are not, dependent on the success or failure of any particular scheme or operation.<sup>13</sup>

We must remember also that not every success of an enemy stems from a failure or a mistake on the part of the revolutionary force. A struggle is a contest in which there are two sides. The antagonist is not a passive object which feeds only on those items foolishly thrown in its direction. It is in continuous active engagement with those who threaten it; and when it scores, it often does so from its own strength and not only from the other side's miscalculations. To engage in struggle is to invite enemy counteraction. To make certain that no blows are ever inflicted means not to engage in struggle. This is not advanced as an apologia for some of the failings cited (all of which have been publicly admitted by the liberation movements): but it emphasizes the need to see these failings in the context of real social struggle, and not just as drawing-board miscalculations.

Certainly, it is fallacious to characterize the years which followed 1961 as wasted and to attribute the setbacks solely to organizational distortions, deficiencies in planning, or ill-judged timing. The inevitable future victory will undoubtedly owe a great deal to the persistence of the liberation movement's turn to a policy of armed struggle. Had it failed to act at all, it would have disappeared as a viable agency for change. Without actions which continued to emphasize that force is vital in the struggle for people's power, it would have left the field clear for a more ready acceptance at home and abroad of a reformist rather than a revolutionary solution. The regime's pursuit of its Bantustan policies and its endeavours, on the basis of these policies and other minor reforms, to seek an accommodation with independent Africa, would face fewer obstacles, if the potential armed alternative had not been kept alive by the persistent attempts of the liberation movement. The current resurgence of black political militancy within the country, particularly amongst the workers and youth, is primarily a response to a whole set of changing objective factors, including (in the case of the workers) the growing gap between wages and prices. But the revolutionary tradition perpetuated by the liberation movement's actions, not only played a part in this resurgence but serves to inform it with more radical aims.

## **THE GUERRILLA PERSPECTIVE**

It is clear that the South African liberation movement's endeavour to lay a basis for sustained armed struggle is perhaps the most difficult on the whole African continent. The enemy here is in stable command of a rich and varied economy, which can finance a massive military budget, of £594 million in 1975, even at the stage when it is not required to extend itself. It has a well-trained army and para-military police force. It can draw on considerable manpower resources from amongst the overwhelming majority of the four million privileged whites, who can be expected to fight with great ferocity and conviction to sustain their privileges. In addition it has rich and influential allies to help build its military and economic potential. It faces an unarmed people historically deprived of opportunities to learn the skills of modern warfare. And it has one of the most sophisticated repressive security machines in the world. If then the employment of force is a subjective imperative, what about these objective difficulties?

The recent history of guerrilla struggle has underlined the fact that the material strength of the enemy is by no means a decisive factor. Witness the resources at the disposal of the French in Algeria; at the height of the fighting, 600,000 troops 'Were supplied and serviced by a leading industrial nation from an economic base quite outside the reach of military operations. Consider the unsurpassed superiority of pure material strength and almost limitless resources of the U.S.A. in Vietnam? Yet neither modern industrial backing, technical know-how nor fire-power swayed the balance in favour of the invaders. Grivas and his Cyprus group challenged the British Army with forty-seven rifles, twenty-seven automatic weapons and seven revolvers. ('It was with these arms and these alone that I kept the fight going for almost a year without any appreciable reinforcements.')<sup>14</sup>

Guerrilla warfare, almost by definition, posits a situation of vast imbalance in material and military resources between the opposing sides. It is designed to cope particularly with a situation in which the enemy is infinitely superior in every conventional factor of warfare. It is supremely the weapon of the materially weak against the materially strong. With a populace increasingly supporting and protecting it whilst opposing and exposing the enemy, a people's army is assured of survival and growth by skilful exercise of tactics. Surprise, mobility and tactical retreat make it difficult for the enemy to 'bring its superior fire-power into play in any decisive battles. No individual battle is fought under circumstances unfavourable to the guerrilla. Superior force can be harassed, weakened and, in the end, destroyed.

The absence of an orthodox front of fighting lines; the need of the enemy to attenuate his resources and lines of communication over vast distances; his need to protect the widely scattered installations on which his economy is dependent (because the guerrilla pops up now here, now there): these are amongst the factors which serve in the long run, to compensate the guerrillas for their disparity in initial strength. I stress the words 'in the long run' because it would be idle to dispute that for a long time the enemy has considerable military advantages from his high level of industrialization, his ready-to-hand reserves of manpower and his excellent roads, railways and air transport which facilitate swift manoeuvre and speedy concentration of personnel.

But over a period of time, many of these very factors could begin to operate in favour of the liberation force. The resources, including food production, depend overwhelmingly upon black labour which will not remain docile and co-operative if the struggle grows in intensity. The white manpower resources, adequate initially, must become dangerously stretched as guerrilla warfare develops. The mobilization of a large force for a protracted struggle would place a further burden on the workings of the economy. The South African Director-General of Strategic Studies, General J. H. Robbertze, stressed the vulnerability of the South African economy in a paper *On the strategic implications of recent developments in South Africa*, presented to an

international conference in Paris in early 1975.<sup>15</sup> He apprehensively predicted the establishment of 'active guerrilla bases' in both Angola and Mozambique. Of South Africa's agricultural production, he declared that, 'in the event of civil war or generalized violence this intricate economic machinery will be disrupted or destroyed'. Many installations, vital power and water supplies might be disrupted with disastrous effects; mines could be flooded. All this, General Robbertze maintains I could lead directly to a virtual paralysis of industrial activity in the country.

In contrast to many other major guerrilla struggles (Cuba was one of the exceptions), the enemy's economic and manpower resources are all situated within South Africa, the theatre of war. There is no economic base area which can remain safe from sabotage, mass action and guerrilla strikes. In an underdeveloped country, the interruption of supplies to any given region may be no more than a local setback. But in a highly sensitive modern economic structure of the South African type, the successful interruption of transport to any major industrial complex would inflict immense damage on the whole economy and on the morale of the enemy. The South African forces would have the task of keeping intact about 30,000 miles of railway lines spread across an area of over 400,000 square miles.

One of the more popular misconceptions concerning guerrilla warfare is that a physical environment which conforms to a special pattern is indispensable: thick jungle, inaccessible mountain ranges, swamps, and so forth. The availability of such terrain is, to be sure, of enormous advantage to the guerrillas, especially in the early non-operational phase when training and other preparatory steps are undertaken, and no external bases are available for this purpose. However, when the operations commence, the guerrilla cannot survive, let alone flourish, unless he moves to areas where people live and work and where the enemy can be engaged in combat. If he is fortunate enough to have behind him a friendly border or areas of difficult access which can provide temporary refuge, it is of course advantageous; although it sometimes brings with it its own set of problems connected mainly with supplies. But guerrilla warfare can, and has been, successfully waged in every conceivable type of terrain: in deserts, in swamps, in farm fields, in built-up areas in plains in the bush and in countries without friendly borders.

The sole question is one of adjusting survival tactics to the sort of terrain in which operations have to be conducted. In any case, in the vast expanse that is South Africa, a people's force will find a multitude of variations in topography; deserts, mountain forests, veld, and swamps. There might not be a single impregnable Sierra Maestra or impenetrable jungle, but the country abounds in terrain which in general is certainly no less favourable for guerrilla operations than some of the terrain in which the Algerians or the resistance movements in occupied Europe operated. Tito, when told that a certain area was 'as level as the palm of your hand and with very little forests', retorted: 'What a first-class example it is of the relative unimportance of geographical factors in the development of a rising.'

In particular South Africa's great size will make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the ruling power to keep the whole of it under armed surveillance in strength and in depth. Hence, an early development of a relatively safe (though shifting) rear is not beyond the realm of possibility. The undetected existence of a SWAPO training camp inside Namibia for over a year and, more especially, the survival for years in the mountains and hills in the Transkei of the leaders of 'Intaba' during the military occupation of the area after the 1960 Pondo Revolt, support this possibility.

## A LOOK AHEAD

But, theory aside, the stark reality is that after more than ten years of effort, there is as yet no evidence of any form of military engagement inside the country. Critics of the liberation movement's strategy during this period have attributed its lack of success to a combination of organizational mistakes and formidable objective obstacles. They point to the fact that since the immediate post-Sharpeville low; the regime has shown a relative economic and political stability, has strengthened its external ties, and has not faced a crisis of the proportions which normally precedes a revolutionary breakthrough. They question whether there are 'grounds for declaring that (the people) prefer death to oppression, the finality of annihilation to the indeterminacy of existence',<sup>16</sup> and ask whether there is psychological readiness and a motivation amongst the Africans to use violence.<sup>17</sup>

Some academic analysts also conclude that the people's readiness to seek a solution by force seems minimal since, 'in spite of the structural violence embodied in South African society, individual violent reactions against this situation have been remarkably limited'.<sup>18</sup> Doubt is expressed whether there are present in South Africa the very specialized conditions in which armed revolutions have made headway elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> It is also suggested that the 'reformist option' persisted long past the point in time when a decision to shift from non-violent struggle might have stood a remote chance of possible success'.<sup>20</sup>

In one form or another, all the critics stress the difficulties of an unarmed people, deprived of opportunities to learn the skills of modern warfare, engaging a powerful and highly industrialized enemy; a factor aggravated by the absence of friendly border states. Most also allude to the negative effects of exile politics in a period in which internal national leadership had been destroyed.

To recognise the validity or partial validity of some of these assessments does not imply that the armed tactic has no place in South Africa's future liberation strategy. Indeed, the ANC and its allies continue to regard the introduction of force as one of the main foundations of such a strategy. They do so for a number of reasons. In the first place (as emphasized in chapter 1) the struggle for majority rule in South Africa today has no realistic backing without it. To abandon the armed tactic is to abandon the people

to forces willing to settle for the scraps of power and not its substance. However long the struggle still takes and however many lessons there are still to be learnt, it is unthinkable for South African revolutionaries, in this era, to return to struggle for reforms only within the white framework; for this is the only alternative.

The obstacles facing the liberation movement in pursuit of its strategy may have disappointed earlier hopes and defied some of the more optimistic predictions. But the defeatist conclusions of many academic analysts are static in their conception and show an onlooker's separation from the demands and processes of active revolutionary struggle. Was there any demonstrable evidence in Mozambique in 1962, when FRELIMO charted the armed path, that the mass preferred 'death to oppression' or that they were psychologically ready to use violence? Were there any more individual reactions against violence in pre-1958 Guinea-Bissau than there are in South Africa? Were the French occupiers of Algeria or the Portuguese occupiers of Angola passing through an identifiable moment of economic or political collapse when the liberation forces in these territories launched their own armed activities? Did the Cubans have a friendly border? Did none of these movements make serious tactical mistakes and were they not also, for a time, dogged by the exile syndrome?

The combination of favourable and unfavourable conditions in which each of these struggles had to be launched was different in each territory. South Africa, too, is a special case. But what is common to them all is that a people which has exhausted the 'reformist option' responds to the revolutionary one when the feasibility of hitting the enemy has been demonstrated by deeds as well as words.

Experiences have been gained and lessons learnt by the ANC and its allies. Against the background of the changing external and internal situations, a more hopeful basis is emerging for the success of a strategy which includes the factor of organized force.

Inside the country there are once again signs of a significant upswing in political awareness and militancy. This will gain momentum as the system remains incapable of overcoming the ever-recurring financial and economic crises inherent in the capitalist mode of production, and more especially as the special contradictions which flow from its internal racist-colonialist character intensify. The efforts to slow down and reverse the process of permanent black urbanization has not succeeded, and white dependence on black labour is growing inexorably.\* This, together with the depressed state of black wages, has already triggered off economic struggles in the recent period which are giving the workers a renewed consciousness of their collective strength. The mining industry, so dependent on foreign labour, faces severe difficulties of labour supply and is being forced to reconsider its migratory labour policies. The creation of a more permanent black work force would, for obvious reason, strengthen the potential for class-based economic and political pressures.



*\*According to Dr Cyril Wyndham of the Chamber of Mines Human Science; Laboratory, by 1980 South Africa will have an economically active population of 10.4 million of which only 1.7 million will be white. Financial Mail, 2 August 1974, p. 408.*

In the Reserves a situation with enormous explosive potential is being created by the crowding into its limited area of more and more millions of impoverished, land-hungry and unemployed Africans.<sup>†</sup>

*†The Government's Tomlinson Commission (1956) talked of the need to create 500,000 new jobs over a ten-year period in and around the Reserves if progress were to be made in the implementation of apartheid. According to the Government-supporting Afrikaanse Handels Instituut (Rand Daily Mail, 18 August 1973) only 8,000 new jobs had been created in all the Bantustans in the previous 10 years. In the 'border' regions the figure for the 11½ years from June 1960 to December 1972 is 78,451. Tomlinson also claimed that the Reserves, which now have a population of 7 million, could only reasonably support life for 2.3 million people even if his recommendations for development investment were carried out.*

The working and student youth in particular are in search of a strategy which will begin to lay the basis of the struggle for power. At the universities and in the schools the mood is 'one of growing hostility to white rule. Organizations such as SASO have not only challenged government policy at the educational institutions but have involved themselves in wider political struggles.

Government attempts to gain Coloured and Indian acceptance of relatively powerless communal institutions as a substitute for direct political representation have made little headway. The Coloured Labour Party, in particular, has once again (in the March 1975 elections) won overwhelming support for its rejection of differential institutions. Indian workers in Natal showed an impressive degree of solidarity with the striking Africans, and many Indian youths have begun to play an active role in newly formed black organizations with militant anti-Apartheid postures. New attempts have been made to revive the Indian Congress movement.

But in all these areas of reawakening, it is already clear that police harassment and intimidation set a limit to the activity and growth of purely legal mass structures. Beyond the struggle for 'moderate' reforms within the framework of continuing white domination, there hovers the state's legal and administrative hatchet. Thus the renewed awareness can no longer express itself, as it could during the fifties, in sustained mass demonstrations. Nor can the struggle for power be mounted by mass legal pressures alone, although these constitute an essential ingredient in the unfolding of the struggle. Without the direct or indirect backing of offensive and defensive force

and effective underground mass leadership, the limits are self-evident; but, with it, this ferment once again sets a more hopeful scene for radical political advances.

If the elusive psychological factor is to be given its place in the projection of future responses to armed activity, there can be no doubt that it has become more favourable for South Africa's liberation movement. The armed victories in the former Portuguese territories and the perceptible progress of armed actions in Zimbabwe and in the Caprivi Strip have had a great inspirational impact on South Africa's black people: because, unlike other such victories, they have happened and are happening next door. And, as already emphasized, these events have also driven home to South Africa's ruling class the growing likelihood of internal insurgency in the not-too-distant future.

But the people's expectations and the enemy's fears aside, there can be no doubt that the dramatic transformation which has taken place in southern Africa has eliminated one of the most serious obstacles in the path of people's insurgency. South Africa is no longer cushioned by states actively hostile to the South African liberation movement. This is not to belittle South Africa's internal strength, which is shored up by direct and behind-the-scenes support from the West. Nor can we dismiss the continued possibility of 'some independent African states taking a leading part in championing the cause of what amounts to collaboration with the counter-revolution'.<sup>21</sup> But despite these factors, both the internal and external balance of forces have become much more favourable to liberation endeavours. The changes that have taken place, especially on South Africa's borders, provide the more militant lobby in the OAU with renewed incentives to oppose the trend of compromise perceptible in the Lusaka Manifesto and in the recent dialogue manoeuvres.

But at the end of the day, the tendencies to support the liberation drive will only become lasting realities through the efforts of the liberation movement itself and its support groups throughout the world. Above all, the extent to which the world translates its verbal condemnation of the racist regime into significant action against it and more direct support for the liberation movement, will depend upon events inside the country.

The liberation movement recognizes that well-planned activities by its armed wing is not the only immediate perspective of struggle in South Africa. Mass political mobilization of people in the urban and rural areas is a vital ingredient and requires a combination of all methods: legal, semi-legal and clandestine. The muscle power of the black working class needs to find stronger organizational expression through the building of a powerful trade union movement. The Bantustan deception must be exposed and fought both inside and outside the so-called 'homelands'. The struggle can no longer be centred on pleas for civil rights or for reforms within the framework of white dominance; it is a struggle for people's power, in which mass ferment and the growing importance of the armed factor go hand in hand. The liberation movement points to this as the only path which can be trodden by the oppressed mass if it is not

to submit permanently to white overlordship. An underground leadership presence within the country itself is the most vital element in the phase ahead, and there are signs that this is, closer than at any time since the pre-Rivonia period.

All this does not mean that the revolution is around the corner. It rather signifies that conditions for its unfolding are perhaps more favourable today than at any time this century.

Oliver Tambo, the Acting President-General of the ANC, in a speech delivered in June 1973, said:

In South Africa, the long stalemate since Rivonia is undeniably over. Everywhere in Southern Africa our struggles are gathering a new momentum and our peoples are striking out in several directions against the Apartheid and colonialist regimes. There is no peace for the enemy. They live in a state of apprehension, doubt and fear. They no longer strut about with arrogant confidence in the permanence of their power. Instead they are now frantically directing their energies into repairing the floodgates which menacingly threaten to burst open in revolution throughout the Southern African region.<sup>22</sup>

When Tambo spoke these words, the situation seemed on the surface less promising than he claimed. FRELIMO, MPLA, and PAI G C were still locked in struggle with Portuguese colonialism; Smith, with Vorster's backing, still clung arrogantly to his belief in the permanence of white rule in Zimbabwe; Namibia was still a routine item on the U.N. agenda; and Vorster seemed unthreatened in his racist fortress. But the turbulence below, which Tambo so correctly sensed, was to surface dramatically. Within a year Portuguese colonialism was no more. Smith was talking a less assured language while Zimbabwean guerrillas cut deep into his territory. Vorster was frantically making his gestures on 'petty Apartheid' and Namibia. Although these and other gestures were of little substance, they nevertheless marked the measure of his apprehension of things to come.

This dramatic lunge forward in the sub-continent's history was the fruit of protracted endeavour and sacrifice by the liberation movements. The unexpectedly swift change was, however, triggered off by an event thousands of miles away: the overthrow of the Fascist dictatorship in Portugal. But the apparently 'accidental' trigger of Lisbon's April Coup was, like all such 'so-called accidents', merely 'the form behind which necessity lurks.'<sup>23</sup>

In South Africa too, struggle in the new conditions sets the scene for the fulfilment of its historical necessity – the early achievement of liberation and freedom from exploitation.

## Footnotes

#### **Chapter 4: Perspectives of Armed Struggle**

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22. *Sechaba*, September 1973, p. 19.
23. F. Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of German Classical Philosophy', Chapter 4, in Marx/Engels, *Selected Works* (3 volume edition), Progress Publishers, Vol. 3, p. 363.